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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001281

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: YASENI CONCERNED ABOUT KARZAI'S CASH ADVANTAGE

REF: KABUL 1144

Classified By: Political Counselor Alan Yu for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Lower House Deputy Speaker and presidential candidate Mirwais Yaseni is asking for US assistance to help balance what he sees as President Karzai's significant advantage over other candidates in terms of cash and the use of government resources. Yaseni has opened campaign offices in 10 provinces and is raising funds from Afghan ex-pat communities, but said he could not keep pace with Karzai's spending. Absent international support for opposition candidates' security, advertising, and transportation expenses, Yaseni believes Karzai will intimidate undecided powerbrokers into his camp before the start of the official election campaign period, blocking opposition efforts to form a coalition, and ensuring low voter turnout and national dissatisfaction with the country's nascent democracy. End Summary.

Yaseni's View on a Level Playing Field

¶2. (SBU) PolOff visited presidential candidate Mirwais Yaseni's newly opened campaign headquarters in Kabul on May 17 to hear Yaseni's concerns over level playing field issues. The office was the largest of six he had opened in Kabul (including two small offices for women and youth). His campaign had opened other offices in his home province of Nangarhar, Baghlan, Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, Kunduz, and elsewhere. Yaseni claimed to have invested \$500,000 in his campaign so far, with another \$250,000 left to spend. Other than paid security staff and a handful of senior aides, most of the 20 campaign staffers spotted during PolOff's visit were unpaid volunteers. Vice presidential running mates and fellow MPs Ammanullah Payman and Abdul Qayum Sajaddi each run one of the other Kabul offices, located in Tajik and Hazara neighborhoods, respectively.

¶3. (SBU) Yaseni expected his remaining funds to last through mid June. He did not think he nor other candidates could mount a credible challenge to Karzai without an increase in funding or international support for security, media, or transportation expenses. Yaseni believed his expenses were on par with United Front nominee Abdullah Abdullah and greater than those of former Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani and the other 40 challengers. He claimed Karzai received financial support from Iran and India and was tapping into the personal fortune of running mate Marshall Fahim Khan. He accused Karzai of attempting use his early resource advantage to lock up the campaign before it officially began by intimidating opponents out of the race and pushing governors, district governors, and local police chiefs to rally support for the government. Yaseni believed Karzai's early apparent advantage has stopped many supporters in Parliament from publicly endorsing Yaseni out of fear they will face retaliation by the Palace.

¶4. (SBU) PolOff explained that the US neither supported not opposed any one candidate, and would not provide resources to

any one campaign. PolOff encouraged Yaseni to speak with Interior Minister Atmar about options for his personal security (ref A). Yaseni to date has used his parliamentary security detail, though expressed interest in having MoI license his private guards to expand their protection of his home, campaign offices, and family members. Yaseni asked for greater consideration of proposals for the international community to support, through the Afghan government or by other means, transportation options for opposition candidates. Yaseni said no candidate could compete with Karzai's ability to travel to distant provinces or sponsor and host large gatherings of provincial leaders in Kabul. Yaseni also requested more international pressure on Karzai to allow independence in state-run media reporting.

Yaseni's Electoral Strategy

15. (SBU) Yaseni believed he would finish second in the Aug. 20 election and force a second round of balloting by keeping Karzai under 50 percent. He believed he could win as much as 30 percent of the first round vote. However, he needed to walk a fine line between sapping northern support from Abdullah and making sure the combined opposition vote kept Karzai from an outright majority. If he ran too well among Tajiks and Abdullah's campaign crashed, Karzai might pick up enough support in the north to win outright.

16. (SBU) Yaseni figures his path to victory needs to combine draining Hazara and Uzbek votes from Abdullah with drawing urban and eastern Pashtun votes from Karzai. As long as the international community curtailed voter fraud in the south,

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Yaseni believed the election would produce a legitimate result, probably with Karzai, himself, Abdullah, and Ghani constituting the top four finishers. However, absent a dedicated international effort to prevent fraud, Yaseni asserted that Karzai supporters would stuff ballot boxes with the votes of "ghost voters," predominately non-existent women registered in absentia by supposed male relatives during the registration process.

A Surprising Admission

17. (C) Yaseni revealed that he had not renounced his UK citizenship prior to registering his candidacy, though was looking in to doing so later this week (the Constitution requires candidates to hold no foreign citizenship at the time of their registration). Prior to this revelation, he admitted misleading fellow Afghans and the international community (including EmbOffs) into thinking he had, at most, legal permanent residence in the UK. Yaseni claimed several candidates were willfully disregarding other election regulations, including campaign financing, and did not expect the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to disqualify him on "this technicality" unless directed to by Karzai.

EIKENBERRY